

MAINE

PREVENTING TOBACCO USE

PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

In 1996 Maine had the highest tobacco addiction rates in the nation for young people aged 18–30 and one of the highest smoking rates for those aged 14–18. Four of 10 Maine high school students in grades 10–12 currently smoke. Although tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, most young people underestimate the health consequences. If current smoking rates in Maine continue, tobacco use will eventually claim the lives of almost 31,000 people who are children in Maine today.

EVIDENCE THAT PREVENTION WORKS

The Life Skills Training Program was designed to help adolescents develop a wide range of personal and social skills. Twelve major evaluation studies have shown that the Life Skills Training Program can reduce cigarette smoking by up to 87% and use of alcohol and other drugs by up to 80%.

PROGRAM EXAMPLE

CDC has established a national framework to support coordinated school health programs in states. As part of this effort, teachers in all middle schools in Maine were offered training and materials for the Life Skills Training curriculum. Surveys show that smoking among high school students in Maine has decreased more than 20% since the Life Skills Training Program was established in 1997. Increases in the state tobacco excise tax and the introduction of community-based tobacco control programs also contributed to this decrease in smoking rates.

IMPLICATIONS

Quality staff development greatly improves the effectiveness of programs to reduce tobacco use among young people. School-based programs to prevent tobacco use should be part of a coordinated school health program for students from grades K through 12 and should be reinforced by community-wide efforts to prevent tobacco use and addiction.